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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: CHIRAC ADVISER: FRANCE'S IRAN POLICY HAS NOT
CHANGED

REF: PARIS POINTS OF FEBRUARY 1

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to Dominique Boche, President Chirac's Middle East advisor, Chirac's comments on Iran (reported in the February 1 edition of the International Herald Tribune) did not contradict official policy or Chirac's own professed views. "France's (Iran) policy has not changed," Boche said flatly. End summary.

The Gaffe

¶2. (C) Embassy PolMinCouns telephoned Dominique Boche, President Chirac's Middle East advisor, to express the Embassy's incomprehension concerning the remarks attributed to Chirac in a February 1 story in the International Herald Tribune by Elaine Sciolino. In the story, Chirac is quoted as saying during the course of a January 29 interview that Iran's possession of one or two nuclear weapons would not be "very dangerous," and that any attempted use of such a weapon would result in Tehran being "razed to the ground." In a clumsy attempt at damage control, Chirac re-summoned Sciolino and her colleagues on January 30 to retract those statements.

The Spin

¶3. (C) Betraying no embarrassment or discomfort, the always taciturn Boche maintained that Chirac's statements did not contradict official policy or Chirac's own professed views. "France's policy has not changed," Boche said flatly. "The French view is that it would be very dangerous for Iran to have nuclear weapons. That is what Chirac told the journalists," he continued.

¶4. (C) In explaining the nature of the threat, said Boche, Chirac had tried to make the point that France is more concerned about proliferation than by the mere prospect of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon. An Iranian bomb in and of itself would not change the regional strategic equation; the danger of its use would be limited given the deterrent power of the existing nuclear powers (hence the specter of razing Tehran). Boche dismissed the argument that Chirac seemed to have completely ignored the impact of the Iranian regime's acquisition of nuclear weaponry on its ability to dominate the region. Chirac's point, insisted Boche, was to emphasize proliferation as France's main concern. That said, Chirac's remarks were in no way meant to "banalize" the idea of a nuclear Iran -- which would only serve to reduce barriers to nuclear acquisition by other governments in the region.

15. (C) NEA Watcher also sought clarification of Chirac's comments from Franck Gellet, MFA DAS-equivalent for Iran and Iraq. Gellet said he had received no guidance from the Elysee and was therefore unable to comment on Chirac's remarks. French media, other than the Nouvel Observateur, have not yet picked up the story. Separately, the special assistant to the Political Director, Gael Veyssiere (protect), told embassy polmiloff that the MFA fully expects the issue to be raised at today's press briefing and that the spokesperson may just refer press queries to the Elysee. In any case, he added, there has been no/no change in France's position against Iran's nuclear ambitions. Voicing a strong personal opinion, he qualified the article as a load of rubbish, "connerie," as the author made personal attacks on Chirac. Further, Veyssiere (protect) added that there are unconfirmed reports that Chirac did not have his Diplomatic Advisor with him, someone who could have redirected the President towards the official French line on Iran. His general impression was that the Elysee did not adequately protect Chirac and subsequently compounded the problem through poor damage control efforts. Post will continue to seek clarification and will promptly report any additional developments.

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